

News Release

Major health benefits seen from strengthening and balancing activity throughout life

- **New evidence review supports current UK Chief Medical Officers' guidance of 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity as well as strength exercises on two or more days a week that work all the major muscles**
- **Only one in three men and one in four women are currently achieving the strengthening and aerobic guidelines for physical activity¹**
- **Musculoskeletal health conditions are the second most common cause of sickness absence in the UK, accounting for 30.8 million days lost in work**
- **Muscle and bone strengthening and balance activity can improve physical and wellbeing at any age and reduce the risk of an early death**
- **It can also help to prevent falls which are responsible for around 95% of all hip fractures, costing the NHS over £1 billion per year**

A Public Health England and the Centre for Ageing Better commissioned evidence review has found that muscle and bone strengthening and balance activities continue to have great health benefits for all adults, including older adults aged 65 years and over. In older adults, poor muscle strength increases the risk of a fall by 76% and those who have already had a fall are three times more likely to fall again. Strengthening and balance activities not only help to prevent this, but also help improve your mood, sleeping patterns, increase your energy levels, and reduce the risk of an early death.

Activities found to have the most benefit for muscle and bone strengthening include:

- ball games
- racket sports
- dance
- Nordic walking
- resistance training (usually training with weights, but including body weight exercises which can be performed anywhere)

The review underlines the importance of the UK CMOs' guidance that all adults need to undertake strengthening and balance activities suitable for them at least twice per week in order to maintain and improve health.

Strength and balance activities can also help improve health during difficult or life-changing times like pregnancy, menopause, onset of or diagnosis of disease, retirement and recovery from hospitalisation.

For those at risk of falls or fracture, supervised structured exercise is also recommended at a pace that suits the individual to help maintain independence and support healthy ageing. Strength & Balance classes are offered by Age UK Oxfordshire. The weekly sessions are evidence-based and focus on improving muscle strength, balance and confidence – many people liken sessions to a fun group physiotherapy session, which are often followed by a social chat and cup of tea. Many classes have now been split into two due to the fact that: 1) the class size became too large, which demonstrates the popularity of these sessions and 2) one session is aimed at people who are able to go down to the floor and perform exercises on a mat. GPs and healthcare professionals are even able to refer patients to these sessions enabling the person to take part in the first 6 weeks for free and they are encouraged to attend regularly thereafter and also perform the exercises at home twice a week.

Class participants said: *'I am very mobile and don't need to have a stick to help me but I do lack confidence after a nasty fall and this class helps enormously'*

Recovering from pelvic fracture - I feel much improved from attending'.

At present the charity runs 25 sessions in the county with plans to roll out many more.

Penny Thewlis, CEO of Age UK Oxfordshire, said:

"We are encouraging **everyone** in later life to take part in activities that help them to strengthen their muscles and maintain their balance. It helps in so many ways, including staying independent and preventing falls. With support from Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, we aim to grow our existing network of 25 Strength and Balance classes to give more older people the opportunity to take part in a class close to home."

Dr Alison Tedstone, head of diet, obesity and physical activity at PHE, said:

"Alongside aerobic exercise such as brisk walking, all adults should be aiming to do strengthening and balancing activities twice per week. On average we're all living longer and this mixture of physical activities will help us stay well in our youth and remain independent as we age."

Dr Zoe Williams, physical activity champion for PHE, said:

"Being active isn't just about getting your heart pumping – although this is a good way to begin. Strength and balance activities work in conjunction with cardio activities like brisk walking, and come with a range of health benefits throughout your life - it's never too late to start."

Jess Kuehne, Senior Engagement Manager, Centre for Ageing Better added:

"It's clear that we need to give equal weighting to activities that boost muscle and bone strength and improve balance rather than simply focusing on aerobic exercise.

"There is significant potential to make savings to health and social care services if we do more to promote muscle strengthening and balance activities and recognise their role in helping to keep people healthy and independent for longer, particularly as they age."

Current statistics show that falls are responsible for around 95% of all hip fractures, costing the NHS over £1 billion per year.

For employers and the economy, musculoskeletal health conditions are the second most common cause of sickness absence in the UK, accounting for 30.8 million days lost in work.

By building on aerobic activities like brisk walking, strengthening and balance activities such as dancing or tennis can help adults to prevent these health problems and enjoy ageing well.

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Notes to Editors:

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For information on Age UK Oxfordshire's Strength & balance classes, please contact Anna McKay annamckay@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk 01235 849403

The evidence review was produced by a working group of UK academics overseen by the UK Chief Medical Officer's (CMO) Expert Group, which was commissioned by Public Health England and the Centre for Ageing Better.

Muscle function, bone health and balance clinical definitions:

Term	Definition
Muscle function	Muscle function is necessary to permit movement and maintain posture. Sensory receptors in the muscles monitor the tension and length of the muscles and provide the nervous system with crucial information about the position of the body parts.
Bone Health	Bone health includes bone quality that refers to the capacity of bones to withstand a wide range of loading without breaking. Bone health also includes bone mineral content, structure, geometry and strength.
Balance	A performance-related component of physical fitness that involves the maintenance of the body balance while stationary or moving.